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NSC BRIEFING

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THE SITUATION AND SHORT-TERM OUTLOOK IN LAOS

- I. Erosion Souvanna's domestic non-Communist support has forced him to very heavy reliance upon pro-Communist Pathet Lao and Kong Le elements.
- A. He has drawn closer to the Communists in both the domestic and international spheres.
- II. We believe these trends will continue. He will probably seek broader and more specific support from Communist Bloc.
- A. On the other hand non-Communist elements which support Phoumi's Revolutionary Committee at Savannakhet and the King at Luang Prabang, have improved their position in recent weeks. They still seriously weak in leadership, unity, and military capability.
- III. Present state of confusion, drift, and disintegration could continue for some time and lead to fragmentation of Laos with the Communists, supported by the Bloc, in control in most of the north, and Revolutionary Committee attempting to set up a separate state in the south.
- A. We believe, however, that pace of events will quicken in the near future and that situation either will move toward some form of political settlement or degenerate into widespread civil war.
- IV. Although compromise political settlement may still be possible, we believe odds are against it.
- A. Situation probably heading toward widespread civil war which could be triggered either by a Phoumi attack on Vientiane or Souvanna/Pathet Lao attack on Luang Prabang.

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- B. We do not believe that Souvanna is likely to resign voluntarily but he may be forced out by political pressures. If so, Pathet Lao will probably step up military action.
- C. If widespread civil war breaks out, it unlikely that forces loyal to the Revolutionary Committee and King could prevent loss of large parts of countryside and a number of key towns.
- V. Even if non-Communist factions surmount immediate crisis fundamental political, economic, and social problems confronting Laos will remain, and Pathet Lao will still pose urgent threat.
  - A. In such circumstances, any Laotian government probably be forced, in time, to move toward neutralist position with Pathet Lao integrated into political life of country, or see situation gravitate again toward civil war.

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